

Lorton-Meadowood Farm Proposed Land Exchange

BACKGROUND: The Department of the Interior has been given an opportunity to protect land in Fairfax County from development and provide public open space for recreation, environmental education, and wild horse and burro interpretation. The Department of the Interior (DOI), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) are working together to dispose of some of the GSA property at the Lorton Correctional Complex in Lorton, Virginia., through land disposal (GSA) and exchange (BLM) federal land for about 905 acres of private land at Meadowood Farm on Mason Neck in Fairfax County, Virginia.

The 8,000-acre Mason Neck, home of Gunston Hall and George Mason IV, author of the Virginia Bill of Rights, is 18 miles south of Washington, D.C. On Mason Neck public uses include the Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mason Neck State Park managed by the Commonwealth of Virginia, and Pohick Bay Regional Park managed by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority. The rural character of Mason Neck and cooperative management provide 5,000 acres for recreation while protecting natural resources. Habitat is provided for migratory and resident waterfowl, bald eagle nesting, feeding, and roosting, and enhances species diversity for a variety of wildlife, including blue heron, wood ducks, screech owls, bluebirds, and tree frogs.

The proposed land exchange will result in protecting significant open space and providing recreational opportunities in Fairfax County. Many residents and groups have publicly expressed support for the proposed exchange to preserve open space on Mason Neck.

The proposed land exchange would be consistent with the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, as amended, and help achieve Presidential and Departmental goals to protect and conserve public land and natural resources. The 1999 Reuse Plan identifies about 235 acres of land at Lorton for residential development. If the exchange takes place, this land, once the GSA certifies it is free of hazardous materials, would be transferred to the owners of Meadowood Farm in return for transfer of the farm to the BLM. The exchange would be made on an equal value basis. Congress has appropriated funds to help GSA pay for environmental clean up at Lorton.

If BLM acquires Meadowood Farm through an exchange, BLM would conduct resource management planning for the site and prepare a management plan for Meadowood Farm in harmony with surrounding land use and community interests. The public would have the opportunity to participate fully in this planning process. Meadowood Farm would be managed by BLM to provide public open space and recreation, including environmental education and interpretation of BLM resource management programs. During a 45-day public comment period ending May 12, 2000, all comments supported public acquisition and management of Meadowood Farm.

BLM has contracted for appraisals of Meadowood Farm and the exchange property at Lorton. Another contractor is gathering cultural resource information on both parcels. Soon a contractor will begin to gather environmental information on Meadowood Farm and prepare a pre-acquisition environmental site assessment (ESA). When the cultural and environmental information is available, BLM will complete and issue a proposed planning analysis and environmental assessment (PA/EA) of the proposed land exchange and public acquisition of Meadowood Farm.

Recently the County of Fairfax offered to purchase Meadowood Farm for \$24 million, according to *The Washington Post* and the *Fairfax Journal*. The County, as owner of Meadowood Farm, could continue processing the land exchange in place of the current owners of Meadowood Farm.

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Lorton13

September 6, 2000